

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



3 1761 01550609 0

Structures on Jonineby

PR
4087
S76









Beaconsfield, Benjamin
Disraeli, 1st Earl of

STRICTURES

ON

“CONINGSBY; OR, THE NEW GENERATION,

By B. D'ISRAELI, Esq. M.P.”

WITH

REMARKS ON THE PRÉSENT STATE OF PARTIES

AND THE

CHARACTER OF THE AGE.

43266
17.2.45

“Injurioso ne pede proruas,
Stantem columnam.”
HOR.

LONDON:
JAMES RIDGWAY, PICCADILLY.
1844.

PR
4087
S76

STRICTURES, &c.

TELL me, says the old adage, what company you keep, and I will tell you what manner of man you are. The axiom holds equally throughout the whole realm of taste and science. Tell me what books you admire, and I will tell you what manner of mind you have. So in music: if you prefer "Bid me discourse," and "Love has eyes," to the airs of Paiesello, or the canzonets of Haydn, you furnish evidence more than enough of your ear for melody. So, if while any persons are praising the magnificence of the Louvre at Paris, you meet them with an eulogium on the British National Gallery at Charing-cross, you at once enable them to take an accurate measure of your architectural taste.

A fondness for light literature is the characteristic of the age. The rugged and uneven stones on the pathway to learning which the student of old jogged over without complaining, are deemed, in these days, only fit for "the hoofs of the swinish multitude." The *march of intellect* must now have its way smoothly shorn. We must luxuriate on the velvet surface of a wooden road ;

and rival patentees are daily contending for the privilege of making "the rough places plain," and of rendering our intellectual progress irresistibly inviting. All this is very well, and we have no intention to find fault with it. Our old ways have been, in every direction, bad enough, and whoever seeks to make them better, performs a most acceptable service.

But may we not after all carry our love of ease and accommodation too far? May not the intellect be so spoilt by indulgence as to be not only unwilling, but unable *to march* at all? According to all appearance, this is by no means an impossible case. If those who undertake to cater for our mental appetites, while they withhold from us all that old substantial English fare upon which the reading public was formerly accustomed to feed and fatten, furnish us in lieu thereof with mere sentimental skimmings, decorated with a garnish of frost-work that sparkles to the eye, but gives the brain no nourishment—if this course of indulgence is to be persisted in, it is time that we should ask ourselves,—in what is it to end?

There is no dearth of labourers in the field of literature, and yet the world does not appear to be getting a whit the wiser? Is the fault of this in the workmen, or is it that a good article cannot be got because an inferior article better suits the market? This question brings us to the truth we have just glanced at,—that the popularity of an

author's work is the surest measure which can be taken of the understanding of those with whom it is so urgently in demand. Let us try the popularity of "CONINGSBY, or THE NEW GENERATION," by this test.

That its story has no consistency—that it exhibits an utter confusion of times and dates—that the writer's incoherence is such "that the latter end of his commonwealth forgets the beginning;" all this we can pass over; they are pardonable faults which may co-exist with much visible and varied excellence. But then they require very decisive merits to compensate them; and in CONINGSBY we have no such indemnity; it is trashy, and wire-drawn throughout. How is it then, that in every literary circle, the first question you are asked, since its appearance, is, "Have you read Coningsby?" Are its encomiasts captivated by any thing eloquent and attractive in the style? Does the dialogue part of it develope any depth of political knowledge, or any powerful wrestling with long received opinions? Are we let into any secrets of government hitherto known only to the initiated? Have we any public characters thrown upon the canvass with a well-practised, original, and masterly hand? Does it any where unfold the principles of any *clique* or party in the State,—be it "young England," or any other,—that may enlighten the public as to its real views, and enable us to judge whether it is a nucleus of high manhood, or a thing of straw? Of

any of these merits, in either kind, not a shadow is to be found. The writer could not produce any such excellence if he would. It is not his vocation. He has no qualities that adapt him for it. That the popularity of his work must be transient is certain ; but the great question is, how came it to acquire such popularity at all ?

Let us take a sample or two of *the style*, the first requisite of which is, that it should give us a clear conception of what is passing in the writer's mind, and of the ideas and sentiments which it is his intention to convey. To do this it must be natural, and suited to the character and circumstances to which it is applied. When Coningsby, the hero of the work, is first introduced to the reader, he is represented as being just turned of eleven ; an age at which a boy takes no interest but in peg-top and trundle-hoop, and has no feeling of reverence for rank or station, which comes only with the gravity and intelligence of after life. His father had died of a fever in a foreign country, to which he had retired as a refuge from his creditors. His mother had returned to England to appeal to her husband's father, the wealthy Lord Monmouth, in behalf of his grandson. This personage, though not having yet seen him, decides that he shall be sent to Eton. He afterwards assents to his being introduced to him, and he is accordingly fetched from school for the purpose. An interview of this kind, it would be natural to suppose, would give the careless little

fellow no concern. But simple matter-of-fact is not Mr. D'Israeli's forte. The scene, to be touching, must be worked up to a pitch of alarm and horror. Matters could not be worse if the boy expected the coming of the hangman with the halter.

"The crisis was at hand, he felt agitated and nervous, and wished himself again at Eton. The suspense was sickening, yet he dreaded still more the summons.

"He was not long alone; the door opened—he started—grew pale—he thought it was his grandfather; it was not even Mr. Rigby. It was Lord Monmouth's valet.

" 'Monsieur Koningby?'

" 'My name is Coningsby,' said the boy.

" 'Milor is ready to receive you,' said the valet.

"Coningsby sprang forward with that desperation which the scaffold requires. His face was pale; his hand was moist; his heart beat with tumult. He had occasionally been summoned by Dr. Keate; that, too, was awful work; but compared with the present, a morning visit. Music, artillery, the roar of cannon, and the blare of trumpets, may urge a man on to a forlorn hope; ambition, one's constituents, the hell of previous failure, may prevail on us to do a more desperate thing—speak in the House of Commons; but there are some situations in life—such, for instance, as entering the room of a dentist, where the prostration of the nervous system is quite absolute."

In common life, if a man wrote or talked thus on such an occasion, we should be inclined to ask for some certificate that he was in his right mind. MARTINUS SCRIBLERUS furnishes us with some fine specimens of that figure of speech called *nothingness*; very nearly allied to what, in common parlance, we call *circumbendibus*, a very expressive term, and of which CONINGSBY furnishes samples in

abundant variety. The above is a curiosity in its way, but we will take one of another sort,—the sentimental: the subject, schoolboy friendship,—very much, we should have imagined, like any other kind of friendship; but no,—before this all other kinds must file off and make way. Love is a fool to it. We have ourselves been at school and at college, but never till now were we aware that a feeling so sublimely sacred, and yet so blustering, as to beat all other feelings out of the field, was to be found there, and only there. But the following is written for our learning:—

“ At school friendship is a passion. It entrances the being; it tears the soul. All loves of after life can never bring its rapture, or its wretchedness; no bliss so absorbing; no pangs of jealousy or despair so crushing and so keen! What tenderness and what devotion; what illimitable confidence, infinite revelations of inmost thoughts; what ecstatic present and romantic future; what bitter estrangements and what melting reconciliations; what scenes of wild recriminations, agitating explanations, passionate correspondence; what insane sensitiveness, and what frantic sensibility; what earthquakes of the heart and whirlwinds of the soul are confined in that simple phrase—a schoolboy’s friendship.”

This rich effusion must be about on a par with the speech of Alfonso in *Don Juan*, of which Byron tells us it was—

“ A fine example, on the whole,
Of rhetoric, which the learn’d call *rigmarole*.”

Why, if Mr. D’Israeli were to give a speech in this style in the House of Commons, such of the interruptive members as are expert at it, would crow

a loud *cock-a-doodle*, and, unbecoming as such a mode of interruption might be, we really, on such an occasion, should feel disposed to pardon it. A deficiency of talent may be overlooked, and we may wade our way through perplexity, but such bombast as the above is not to be borne with. There is no stock of patience that can hold out against it. At no time within the date that *Anno Mundi* includes, has there been any thing to exceed it.

CONINGSBY is bred at Eton—a college that ranks the first of our public seminaries. The distinguished men that it has sent into public life justify this precedence. This could not have been unless the masters had been capable of giving an effective impulse and direction to whatever aptitude for learning they found in their pupils. It was the duty of Mr. D'Israeli to have made this truth felt and acknowledged. He had ample warranty for so doing, and we live in times when such a duty ought not to have been disregarded. The public requires that its faith in the character of our public schools should be strengthened; at all events that we should not take from them anything of the homage which they fairly deserve. Mr. D'Israeli has not intentionally done this; but he has shewn a remarkable want of good sense in the following dialogue, the tendency of which, a writer of better judgment would have avoided. If he were discussing the subject of public education, and the impression which it conveys were an impartial one, he would

deserve praise ; but as it stands, it presents a picture of imbecility in the younger boys of Eton that, in these days, would disgrace a Dame-school.

"It is settled, the match shall be between Aquatics and Dry-bobs," said a senior boy, who was arranging a future match at cricket.

"But what's to be done about Fielding major?" inquired another. "He has not paid his boating money ; and I say he has no right to play among the Aquatics before he has paid his money."

"Oh ! but we must have Fielding major, *he's such a devil of a swipe.*"

"I declare he shall not play among the Aquatics if he does not pay his boating money. It is an infernal shame."

"Let us ask Buckhurst. Where is Buckhurst?"

"Have you got any toffy?" inquired a dull looking little boy in a hoarse voice of one of the venders of scholastic confectionary.

"Tom trot, Sir."

"No, I want toffy."

"Very nice tom trot, Sir."

"No, I want toffy ; I have been eating tom trot all day."

"Where is Buckhurst ? We must settle about the Aquatics."

"Well, I for one will not play if Fielding major plays amongst the Aquatics. That's settled."

"Oh ! nonsense : he will pay the money if you ask him."

"I shall not ask him again. The Captain duns us every day. It's an infernal shame."

"I say, Burnham, where can one get some toffy ? This fellow never has any."

"I'll tell you ; at Barnes's on the bridge ; the best toffy in the world."

"I'll go at once. I must have some toffy."

Mr. D'Israeli must have but little regard for the

reputation of Eton, and still less for his own, when he can pen such wretched trash as this as a sample of the colloquy of its scholars. He will certainly not secure *their* plaudits by such a lowering exhibition of them. It is the less excusable, as any specimen of individual character and manners, being quite uncalled for, the discredit cast upon them is gratuitous; such an avoidable offence against good taste can have no apology.

An occasional disregard of the niceties of language may be permitted in giving a vivid and faithful picture of low life. But for this the writings of Fielding and Smollett would lose much of their force and all their originality. But in a work that finds its way to the drawing rooms and the boudoirs of ladies, vulgarity should never be volunteered. However familiar his society may have made him with the slang of the pot-house or the stable, a novel writer, more especially if he be an M.P., should not unnecessarily put his resources in this way under contribution. He should not obtrude for instance such low phrases as the following, which are but a few out of many to be found in the course of his work.

“Lord Monmouth thought he could read character by a glance, and in general he was very successful, for his natural sagacity had been nurtured by great experience. His grandson (young Coningsby) was not to his taste; amiable, no doubt, but a *spooney*.”

When the Montem is introduced, we have the following conversational jumble.

"A knot of boys, sitting on the Long Walk wall, with their feet swinging in the air, watched the arriving guests of the Provost.

"I say, Townshend," said one, "there's Grobbleton; he *was* a bully. I wonder if that's his wife. Who's this? The Duke of Agincourt. He was'n't an Eton fellow? Yes, he was. He was called Poitiers then. Oh! Oh! his name is in the Upper School, very large, under Charles Fox. I say, Townshend, did you see Saville's turban? What was it made of? He says his mother brought it from Grand Cairo. Don't he just look like the Saracen's Head! Here are some Dons. That's Hallam; we'll give him a cheer. I say, Townshend, look at this fellow. *He does'nt think small beer of himself,*" &c. &c.

It is, at least, as well to wait till 'the sovereignty of the people' is better confirmed, before the "*New Generation*" familiarize us to the vocabulary that belongs to it. If, indeed, it be thrown in as a seasoning which the popular palate is sure to relish, why so much the worse. But we have already too plentiful a crop of this sort of vulgarity, to make it necessary for Mr. D'Israeli to bring *his* sheaves to the harvest. Let him, at least, wait till the old crop is off the ground.

It is not well in any work to have things of shadow imposed upon us for things of substance. Every writer is free to employ, as best he can, the materials and instruments he has to work with, and to make his impression, be it from fiction or reality, as graphic as he is able. If he has real genius, he will do this skilfully and with effect. In treating a fictitious subject, he may make it as poetical as he will; it is enough for his readers that he makes

it attractive as a vehicle of amusement or of instruction, as the case may be. But he is not warranted in inveigling us into a belief that he is lifting up the veil that hides from us the private movements and actions of existing men. That incidents purely the invention of his own brain are matters of fact, and capable of authentic voucher.

By this adroit mixture of truth and falsehood we are imposed upon; the more distinct and impressive it is, the greater is the imposition, and neither a novel nor any other work ought to be made the vehicle of deception.

It is a leading objection to CONINGSBY, that it deals too much throughout in this trade trickery. We will confine ourselves to the instance of SIDONIA, in the second volume.

SIDONIA is described as of noble and ancient Jewish lineage: of his father the following account is given:

“During the long disorders of the Peninsular war, when so many openings were offered to talent, and so many opportunities seized by the adventurous, a cadet of a younger branch of this family made a large fortune by military contracts, and supplying the commissariat of the different armies. At the peace, prescient of the great financial states of Europe, confident in the fertility of his own genius, in his original views of fiscal subjects, and his knowledge of national resources, this Sidonia, feeling that Madrid, or even Cadiz, could never be a base on which the monetary transactions of the world could be regulated, resolved to emigrate to England, with which he had, in the course of years, formed considerable commercial connections. He arrived here

after the peace of Paris, with his large capital. He staked all that he was worth on the Waterloo loan, and the event made him one of the greatest capitalists in Europe."

Conjecture is instantly set to work to discover for whom this is meant.—"Oh," we hear an old Dowager exclaim, instinctively taking off her spectacles, "that's ROTHSCHILD; you know he was the richest Capitalist in Europe. He came from the East, I know. Herries, when he was Commissary in chief, was very intimate with him; I recollect his telling us that the name was properly RATHSCHELD. Don't you remember we dined with his brother, the great banker, at his chateau a few miles out of Paris, the day after his marriage."—"I forget," says her maiden sister.—"Dear me! why I remember your remarking how desolate the carriage-drive was up to the mansion, and how unlike anything of the kind in England."—"I really quite forget."—"Why, Dorothy dear, what a memory you have, why you are getting quite frail."

We will leave the Dowager to circulate her supposed secret; and pass on.

In the height of this vast prosperity, we are told, he suddenly died, leaving only one child, a youth still of tender years, and heir to the greatest fortune in Europe, so great, indeed, that it could only be calculated by millions.

This only son, excluded by his Mosaic faith from our Universities, has a private tutor appointed him, by name Rebello. At seventeen he parts with

Rebello, and sets out upon his travels. He visits Germany, passes two years between Paris and Naples, spent, apparently, we are told, "in the dissipation which was perhaps inseparable from his time of life." The moment he comes of age he begins travelling in a more mysterious manner, and on a more gigantic scale.

"SIDONIA was absent from his connexions for five years, during which period he never communicated with them. They were aware of his existence only by the orders which he drew on them for payment, and which frequently arrived *from all quarters of the globe*.* He dwelt a considerable time in the Mediterranean regions, penetrated Nilotic Africa, to Senaar and Abyssinia; traversed the Asiatic continent to Tartary, whence he had visited Hindostan and the Isles of that Indian Sea which was so little known. Afterwards he was heard of at Valparaiso, the Brazils, and Lima. He evidently remained some time at Mexico, which he quitted for the United States. ONE MORNING, *without notice*, HE ARRIVED IN LONDON."

"Sidonia had exhausted all the resources of human knowledge; he was master of the learning of every nation; of *all* tongues, dead or living; of *every* literature, Western or Oriental. He had pursued the speculations of *science* to the last term,† and had himself illustrated them by observation and experiment. He had lived in all orders of society; had viewed *every* combination of nature and of art, and had observed man under *every* phase of

* Query? How could this happen *frequently*? He must surely have had the speed of Ariel, in the Tempest, that could

"Put a girdle round about the world
In forty minutes."

† Including, of course, the LAW REPORTS.

civilization. He had even studied him in the wilderness. The influence of creeds and laws, manners, customs, traditions, in all their diversities, had been subject to his personal scrutiny."

That thus scampering over the globe in all directions—now at this end, now at the other—and doing all this in a coat of darkness, so that his nearest relatives knew nothing of his "whereabout," till his purse required to be recruited by a draft payable at sight: that in the midst of this perpetual motion, and in spite of it, this stripping of the synagogue, but just out of his teens at starting, should have found time "to exhaust all the resources of human knowledge!" and to make himself "master of the learning of every nation, of all tongues, dead or living!! of every literature, Western or Oriental!!"—is matter for wonderment unmatched in all chronicles of the marvellous that has ever yet appeared. To use Sam Slick's phrase, "*it beats all natur.*" And yet we find all this affirmed, veritably, and in sober seriousness. It may, perhaps, not be too strong a dose for the credulity of *Judæas à pella*; well, let the circum-
cised Jew believe it. *and no one else.*

When a writer confessedly brings a creature of fiction before us, we are delighted to follow him to the full scope of his fancy. He has the poet's privilege to "body forth the form of things unknown," and no one would willingly put a curb on his imagination. Should the author of CONINGSBY,

Mr. Coningsby!

during the recess, sit down to write a romance, he will then, allowedly, have all the realms of fancy at his command. He is for the time being the "Monarch of all he surveys." He holds communion with beings of a different framework from our own, and we are thankful to profit from the intercourse. But he is avowedly writing a political novel, and so frames his narrative as to work out his own political views; that here, he should studiously contrive to have it believed, that, under feigned names he is portraying distinguished men filling high and responsible stations in real life—is on no ground defensible.

If, for example, in the instance of Sidonia, were presented to the reader as an avowedly fictitious character, however *outré* and out of keeping it may be, it is a fault in judgment to which no moral blame attaches. But when he introduces to us this prodigy of an *Israelite*, not as the coinage of his own brain, but as a veritable Being—a creature of flesh and blood—it is bad enough; but it is still worse when this is done for no other purpose but that of exciting an interest that may speed the circulation of the work;—such a money-making manœuvre is discreditable. It is mixing up real men with the figures of a phantasmagoria. The reader knows not what part of his narrative to put faith in; the whole becomes a mystification and a humbug.

The great demand for *Coningsby* arises, no

doubt, from the supposed delineation of public characters that is to be found in it? But this morbid curiosity must have been sorely disappointed. There is not one individual, moving in a high political circle or out of it, of whose secret sayings or doings, the slightest information of any interest is to be gained! Paragraphs have indeed found their way into the Newspaper press, in the shape of advertisements and otherwise, furnishing a key to the characters of Lord Monmouth, Mr. Rigby, Henry Sydney, Lucian Gay, and others. But this is mere author-craft. Out of a whole bunch of such keys not one will fit. It were folly to expect it. Those who know the upper world—of politics especially—know that they who move in the very same circle with a great man, or a great minister, are as much deceived as others. You will not make out the real structure of his mind approach him ever so nearly. But there is a passion for private anecdotes of the great, and one infected with it, would go as far to pick up a tale of intrigue, or to get a peep behind the curtain, as a countryman would do to see a man stand upon his head on the church-weathercock. The *New Generation* is, in this respect, no better than the old. The hunger for calumny is as keen as ever; but thus it will be as long as the world lasts, and there is no help for it. “Man that is born of a woman,” is the animal that least of all does credit to his parentage.

A good Novel writer may draw a character ad-

mirably, either male or female—he may endow it with peculiar and extraordinary attributes—he may make it excite the most intense interest, and yet keep it true throughout to reason and reality. If he has been an acute observer of life and manners, he will do this from his knowledge of human nature, and from a philosophic insight into the inward workings of the human mind. But as for drawing the *political* character of Lord A—, or Lord B—, why neither Lord A—, nor Lord B—, know their own character! What reliance then can be placed on the sketch by a bystander, be his penetration what it may. The features and position of his subject are never fixed ; they change with every sitting.

“ His principle of action once explore,
That instant 'tis his principle no more ;
Like following life thro' creatures you dissect,
You lose it in the moment you detect.”

As to the character of those who play a prominent part in the theatre of public affairs, all that it is important to know of them is, in these times, known with tolerable exactness to the great bulk of the people. The acts of such men are before them, and from these they draw their inferences. The press, too, is active, and omnipresent. *L'histoire souterraine*, as the Prince de Ligne, in one of his delightful letters well expresses it, is speedily above ground ; and the secret of their errors and their weaknesses, is for the most part much better

known than their personal views, or their private virtues.

It is at all times easy to get at the great and striking events of a man's public life ; but, the difficulty is, to form a correct judgment of them. This cannot be done without a knowledge of the facts and motives that prepared, or produced them. In the complex concerns of administration and government, the means of obtaining this knowledge are very rare. The characters of "Statesmen in the times of George III." recently given to the world by Lord BROUGHAM, are among the best drawn in modern literature. But he brought to his work advantages singularly fitted to the task—a mind of extensive research, trained from the cradle to investigation, and gifted by nature with powers equal to any achievement in literature or in science.

It is only as food for scandal that the acts and incidents of a man's private life are sought after. Malice, ill-nature, revenge,—the worst passions of our nature,—are more abroad than the School-master. How much of every public man's reputation is daily whispered away by slanders circulated in *entre nous's*. There is a known portion of the Newspaper press that owes its whole circulation to its waging this sort of warfare. Every number brings its columns of falsehood, and its paragraphs of defamatory *on dits*. And this—we say it with a feeling of shame for the English public—is met with a patronage which makes it a gainful trade ; for

without that extensive sale, which indicates great public encouragement, it could not be.

The evil of this is incalculable, and it is among the worst features of the times. It tends to depress that love of honourable distinction which is the great incentive to all that is praiseworthy in public station. To act, under all circumstances, well and nobly, demands a sacrifice of self-interest which only the warm commendation of his fellow men can compensate. If this reward is withheld, and he finds that he is made a butt for the shafts of satire, and that a willing ear is lent to every insinuation that can tend to destroy his influence, and to blacken his fame—can the public expect, that, however he may bear up against it for a time, he will pursue his onward course with his wonted firmness? Is it in nature that he should do so? If he has a seat in the legislature—whether in the Lords or Commons—the chance is that he will cease those earnest exertions for the public good which expose him to party hatred, and consult his own quiet by retiring from public observation.

It is true such men as **LYNDHURST**, **BROUGHAM**, or **SIR ROBERT PEEL**, may treat such abuse and misrepresentation with indifference. They may regard it as the price of their political elevation, and their moral courage may raise them above it. They know, too, that their intellectual distinction will live it down. But many a man of weaker nerve—worthy and excellent men nevertheless—who look with no hope but to the discernment of the public,

and to no reward but its commendation, have sunk under such discouragement, and their valuable services has been lost to us for ever.

It is not a little to be lamented that works of fiction have well nigh superseded those standard works of our language, which were always found in the hands of self-educated men, and which furnished that substratum of solid knowledge upon which their subsequent acquirements were founded. We live in an age of periodicals. All subjects, whether political, religious, or literary, are minced and served up in short tracts, light and easy of digestion. No publisher in these times would think of laying "a Body of Divinity" on his counter. Even the stomach of a High-churchman would revolt at it. So with politics; a volume, however valuable, on the Science of Legislation, would lie with its leaves uncut, and with no chance of a customer. Not that all concern about politics and divinity is at a standstill. Quite the reverse. Evangelical tracts are in number as the sands of the sea. In every village they are thrown in at the windows, and pushed under the doors, until they become a drug, and the cottager makes waste paper of them. Puritanism has every where its visiting districts. Religion is not sustained as formerly, by virtuous training and by the influence of moral example. Both the mode and the market is changed. We uphold it now by subscriptions, and support it by *fancy fairs*; fairs in which the well-dressed ladies who preside degradingly at the stalls, make *themselves*

cheap, and their wares *dear*. But Ministers, as well in the Church as the State, have their budget of *ways and means*; and this form of *taxation* belongs to it.

“YOUNG ENGLAND!” What is it, we would fain ask, that has regenerated England with a second growth? In the hopper of what mill has she been ground into juvenility? And, then, “THE NEW GENERATION!” by what Harlequin’s wand has it been called into existence; and to what *order* does it belong? Is it the order of the *Gilets blancs*, or what other? These are grave inquiries; but there are others of more importance still. Have they brought with them any new remedies—homœopathic or hydropathic—for the cure of our constitutional ailments in Church and State? Or is it only an Army of observation, with one eye upon the present, and the other upon the future? It is early times; they are not yet sufficiently in the light. We can see their form, but not their features; and their atmosphere is for the present in a mist. They appear to have no faith in any thing, or in any body! It was not thus in that *Old Generation* which has figured in the history of centuries, and to whom we owe our freedom as a people, and our greatness as a nation.

It is given out that *Coningsby* is their Manifesto. Viewed in this light, it may be worth while, as far as it is translateable into common sense, to try what we can gather from it.

We are told—and we are told it in a very magisterial tone,—that there are two parties in this country, the *Destructive* and the *Conservative*, and that “these two classes comprehend at present the English nation.” This secret fact is evolved in a dialogue between Coningsby and Mr. Milbank. They talked it over, it seems, “all day and late into the night. They condensed into a week the poignant conclusions of three years of almost unbroken study.” The result of such a condensation ought to be very luminous and very *piquant*. For those who would form a judgment, here it is:—

“The principle of the Exclusive Constitution of England having been conceded by the acts of 1827-8-32,” said Coningsby, “a party has arisen in the State, who demand that the principle of political liberalism shall consequently be carried to its extent; which it appears to them is impossible without getting rid of the fragments of the old constitution that remains. *This is the DESTRUCTIVE PARTY*; with distinct and intelligible principles. They seek a specific for the evils of our social system in the general suffrage of the population.

“They are resisted by another party, who, having given up Exclusion, would only embrace as much Liberalism as is necessary for the moment; who, without any promulgation of principles, wish to keep things as they find them, as long as they can, and then will manage them as they find them, as well as they can; but as a party must have the semblance of principles, they take the names of the things that they have destroyed. Thus they are devoted to the prerogatives of the Crown, although, in truth, the Crown has been stripped of every one of its prerogatives. They affect a great veneration for the constitution in Church and State, though every one knows that the constitution in Church and State no longer exists; they are ready to stand or fall with

the "independence of the Upper House of Parliament," though in practice they are perfectly aware, that, with their sanction, the "Upper House," has abdicated its initiatory functions, and now serves only as a Court of Review of the legislation of the House of Commons. Whenever public opinion, which this party never attempts to form, to educate, or to lead, falls into some violent perplexity, passion, or caprice, this party yields without a struggle to the impulse; and when the storm has past, attempts to obstruct and obviate the logical, and ultimately, the inevitable results of the very measures they have themselves originated, or to which they have consented. *This is the CONSERVATIVITY PARTY."*

What rational conception can any one form of the state of parties in this country from such a vague *riddle-me-ree* description as this? The pragmatism of knowledge which it exhibits, is absolutely ludicrous. The writer would fain have it believed that he is intimately acquainted with the interior of our political system, while he covers his ignorance of it under a confused mass of words and phrases that amount to nothing. It is absurd and puerile to speak of a *Destructive* party as a known and recognized party in the State, whose aim it is, *le couteau à la main*, to cut up our ancient institutions, and thus, in the language here used, "to get rid of the fragments of the old constitution that remains." At no time, and in no nation, did such a party exist; and to affirm that it exists in this country, and exists, too, "with distinct and intelligible principles," betrays a wilfulness of assertion upon which all comment would be wasted.

There is a party, as we all know, to which the

epithet *Destructive* has been insidiously applied—but which the better class of Tories are too conscientious to apply to it,—that openly profess their wish that the political rights, vested by law and nature in the people of every state, should be exercised by those in power for the protection and well-being not of the few, but of “the masses;” and who would fain procure such reforms in the Constitution as might attain the great object at which they aim. There may be more or less of wisdom or of prudence in the means through which they seek to attain it; but they at least seek it in good faith, which is no light praise.

The portrait of the Conservative party is equally unmeaning. It has not one feature in common with the original which it affects to delineate. Coningsby has manifestly an ambition to have it thought that he is letting the public into the secret of the plans and principles of this party. There is an air of overweening pretension in his tone that is ludicrous. Instead of bringing the two parties into striking and luminous contrast, as it was to be expected he would do, from the opposite positions in which they stand, he does not even keep them distinct. The confusion is inextricable. Not only does each take something of the other's colour, but the *Conservatives*, in his account of them, are absolutely the greater *Destructives* of the two. By the former party, “the Crown has been stripped of every one of its prerogatives.” Under them, it seems, “the

constitution in Church and State no longer exists." The Upper House has, "with their sanction," come to be no more than a Court of Review. *Rebus sic stantibus*, there is clearly no *Conservative* party. It is a misnomer.—All this jumble and contradiction comes from a man's lecturing dogmatically upon a subject which he does not understand.

The two parties familiarly known to our history as waging war for supremacy, are the Whigs and Tories ; others have sprung up of later date that have endeavoured, and endeavour still, to force their way through the two former, to popular notice and support. They have each their peculiar views and doctrine, by which, in spite of their profession, the initiated can distinguish them, as CUVIER could discover from a fossil bone the genus and habits of the animal to which it belonged.

The modern Conservative differs materially from the old Tory. He is cast in an improved mould. He is one who "hath been faulty, and is amended." His leading prejudices and predilections are no secret. He is not fashioned in the mode of the day. He prefers the authority of the Crown, to the authority of the Citizen. He does not patronize that zeal for liberty which is signalised by a red cap. He has an aversion to every thing *sansculotic*, and has a favourable leaning towards standing armies ; for, bearing no ill-will towards "the masses," he knows that some among them have great capabilities for mischief, and he likes to be

secure against explosions. Some are of opinion that he puts too strong fences round much that is not worth preserving; but he has a large organ of caution, without which he would not be a *Conservative*.

The change upon the whole is cheerful. The ancient *régime* has given way. Secret sittings with closed doors are matters which exist only in memory. Their patrons are defunct. There are still—as there always has been, and always will be—two leading parties in the State, but they cannot each play out their own political game behind the curtain, as in days bygone. A third party has arisen which keeps them both in check—THE PARTY OF THE PEOPLE. In the order of precedence, it takes rank after the King, Lords, and Commons, but in reality it is the ruling power. Both the supporters and the opponents of ministry must alike keep an eye to it. It is the FOURTH ESTATE. It can dismiss, but cannot be dismissed. It is but of late years that it has risen into being; but since its appearance, the sinews of the other three are sadly weakened. They complain that their strength is but “labour and sorrow.” It was with much struggling that this fourth estate made itself recognized as a legitimate power. The others coped with it as long as they could; but the contest was fruitless, and they at length gave it the fraternal embrace, and said, each of them, perhaps a little reluctantly, —“*This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my*

flesh ;” and a few more years, it is hoped, will sweep away the living race of old women that disclaim the relationship, and still stick to “ their order.”

“ Young England,” when she comes to the work of reconstruction, will shew us that our English Constitution has abundantly more than is sufficient for her life and growth. She will begin by ridding us of *Parliamentary representation* as superfluous. We learn from this her Manifesto, that,

“Representation is not necessary ; or even, in a principal sense, Parliamentary. Parliament is not sitting at this moment, and yet the nation is represented in its highest, as well as its most minute interests.”

The next step, no doubt, will be to abolish the Courts of Law. That it is called for on the same principle of reasoning is easily shewn :—The Courts are not sitting at this moment. It is long vacation ; and yet the nation goes on advancing its highest, as well as its most minute interests, as actively, and as successful, as if the twelve Judges were dispensing justice in full costume.—Not in all the logical works of Aristotle is there a sample of closer or more conclusive reasoning than this !

If we want to know in what true political and parliamentary wisdom lies, our *Doctor maximus* will inform us :—

“True wisdom lies in the policy that would effect its ends by the influence of opinions, and yet by the means of existing forms. Nevertheless, if *we are forced to revolutions*, let us propose to our consideration the idea of a free monarchy, established on fundamental laws, itself the apex of a vast pile of municipal

and local *government*, ruling an educated people, represented by a free and intellectual press. Before *such a royal authority*, the sectional anomalies of our country would disappear."

All this is, no doubt, profoundly instructive ; the only difficulty is to get at the meaning of it.

There is a change working in the national character of England, which it is dispiriting to contemplate. Among the worst signs of the times, is that prevailing eagerness of gain which approaches to a mania. All the generous attributes of high and manly character which once distinguished it, are fast fading away. Individual interest is every thing. Every one is busied in storing his own larder, careless of the thousands that are wearying onwards with an empty wallet.

Society seems to have wrenched itself from all its old fastenings. It has well nigh ceased to be trust-worthy. That confiding fellowship, which is the soul of social intercourse, is withered, and worn up by conventional artifice and the spirit of party. In business, as in common life, men get on by shifts and expedients. So boundless is our commerce, and so universal is the system of money-getting, that the nation is divided into two classes—debtors and creditors.

Endless debates are carried on in Parliament on the subject of *National Education*. The Church claims to have the popular mind in its holy keeping, and the bickering about infant schools is without end ; but towards removing evil example and

misery nothing is done. In the mean time, the multitudes are getting instruction regardless of the Church Catechism, and they are getting it in a very gloomy mood. Knowledge is in a perpetual state of transfusion from mind. Among the working-classes, who draw their life-breath in an atmosphere of their own, there are always certain Leaders whose opinions are looked up to, and whose sentiment on all subjects, whether of politics or religion, circulate from loom to loom, and from manufactory to manufactory. The operatives have a train of thought in their heads to-day which they had not yesterday. It is thus that with the million the process of education is perpetually going on.—Woe to the Government that is unmindful of this, or that treats it as a thing that may be trifled with.

True it is, as I have elsewhere said, that to enlighten the mind is to mend the moral character, and that no act can be more praiseworthy than the diffusion of useful knowledge; but unless the bulk of the operative classes have *leisure* to profit by its diffusion, it cannot be useful to *them*. It matters not how cheap the vehicles of its communication may be; in the present state of the working-class, the majority have scarcely time for rest, much less for *reading*. The exhausted strength of to-day is recruited only to carry them through the labour of to-morrow. But in vain shall we expect the multitude to attend to the cultivation of their minds, till their bodies are clothed and fed. This ever

will, and ever must be, their first study. All beyond it must come—if it comes at all—when the heart is at ease. At present the prospect of this is distant.

A loud and most malignant outcry has been raised against the Poor-law amendment system. The spirit of party is incessantly at work to excite the popular hatred against it. Its slightest defects, even in its most minute details, are hunted up, and placed in the fore-ground, while all that is salutary in its operation is kept out of sight. On no subject have the minds of the lower classes been more bitterly irritated, or more studiously misled.

The old Poor-law system, corrupted by deplorable imposition and mismanagement, had become one of the greatest curses that ever inflicted the kingdom ; had it continued a few years more, the ruin of the agriculturists was inevitable. It had degraded the character of the peasantry, and destroyed in them that best of all attributes—a manly self-dependence. It tended to blend the acquired vices of pauperism *with their daily habits*, and thus render them incurably worthless. Every intelligent man was rejoiced to hear its knell rung out, and to have the nation well rid of it.

A greater revolution than the world has yet seen, is still in the womb of time. Greater than that of France, but growing out of it. It will deal with property in a way that property has never yet been dealt with. The present unequal distribution of it is pregnant with convulsion. A darkness has long

been collecting in the horizon, prophetic of a storm, that when it comes—and it is not very far in the distance—will shake the territorial aristocracy to its foundations. It will be felt—and fearfully too—by wealth of every kind, whether of inheritance or acquirement. The only source of hope that presents itself that the darkness may pass off, is, that the science of government is becoming every day better understood, and our rulers more inclined to mould themselves to the spirit of the age.

When a writer, holding the rank of a statesman, and having the means of gaining attention, takes up his pen, the times in which we live require a work very different from the one before us. His station invests him with a responsibility which an ordinary writer does not incur. We look to him for such knowledge as we may apply to the exigencies of the present, and the coming-on of the future.

But Mr. D'ISRAELI, it seems, has a remedy at hand. The close of his work is full of consolation, his Hero is to save us.

“I have immense faith in the *New Generation*,” said Milbank eagerly.

“It is a holy thing to see a state saved by its youth ;” said CONINGSBY, and then he added in a tone of humility, if not of depression, “But what a task! What a variety of qualities, what a combination of circumstances are requisite! What bright abilities, and what noble patience! What confidence from the people, what favour from the Most High!”

"But he will favour us," said Milbank; "and I say to you as Nathan said to David, THOU ART THE MAN."

Judging from the light thrown on his capacity, we should—with due deference—doubt the fact. We give the following, as a few among many of our vouchers for holding a contrary opinion.

Coningsby's conception of free government :—

"The House of Commons is the house of a few; the Sovereign is the Sovereign of all. The proper leader of the people is *the individual* who sits on the throne."

Coningsby, in love, soliloquises.

"He came to the bank of a rushing river, foaming in the moonlight, and *wafting* on its *blue breast* the shadow of a thousand stars.

"Oh! River!" he said, "that rollest to my mistress, *bear her, bear her, MY HEART!*"

Coningsby declares his passion.

"Edith on her rustic seat watched the now blue and foaming river, and the birch trees with a livelier tint, and quivering in *the sunset air*. An expression of tranquil bliss *suffused* her beautiful brow, and *spoke* from the thrilling tenderness of her soft dark eye. Coningsby *gazed* on that countenance *with a glance* of entranced rapture. She turned her head, she met that glance, and troubled, she withdrew her own.

"Edith," he said, in a tone of tremulous passion, "*let me call you EDITH!* Yes," he continued, gently taking her hand, "*let me call you my Edith!* I LOVE YOU!"

Coningsby caught in a shower. A picture of NATURE *weeping* :—

"The drops became thicker; they reached, at a rapid pace,

the cottage. The absent boat indicated that Sir Joseph and Oswald were on the river. The cottage was an old building of rustic logs, with a very shelving roof, so that you might obtain sufficient shelter without entering its walls. Coningsby found a rough garden seat for Edith. The shower was violent.

“NATURE, like man, sometimes weeps from gladness. It is the joy and tenderness of her heart that seeks relief. *In this instance*, the vehemence of her emotion was transient, though the *tears* kept stealing down her cheeks for a long time, and gentle sighs *and sobs* might for some period be distinguished. The oppressive atmosphere had evaporated; the grey, sullen tint had disappeared; a soft breeze *came dancing up the stream*; a *glowing light* fell upon *the winds and waters*; the perfume of trees and flowers, and herbs, floated around. There was a carolling of birds; a hum of happy insects in the air; freshness *and stir* and a sense of joyous life *pervaded all things*. It seemed that THE HEART OF ALL CREATION OPENED.”

Astonishment at events; and philosophical comment thereupon.

“What *wonderful things* are EVENTS! *The least* are of greater importance *than the most sublime and comprehensive speculations!*”

Whether “YOUNG ENGLAND” will eventually raise her head higher than *La Jeune France*, we cannot prophecy; but of this NEW GENERATION, and its leaders, we feel no hesitation in saying, as a distinguished Frenchman said of the Upstarts of the French Revolution: — *Ils ne valent pas le diable à gouverner.*

One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh,—but the saying has passed into a proverb, that, ‘When the old one is gone, there seldom comes a better:’ and we suspect this

will hold true of the *New Generation*; and that it will turn out but an opinionative, empty, half-witted race, compared with our valorous, sturdy, peak-bearded forefathers, whose virtues we delight to honour.

The Jew

In these days, as of old, Wisdom crieth in the street, and no one regardeth her. All are forward to teach, but disdain to learn. In the midst of darkness, no one will walk but by the light of his own lanthorn. Each is desirous of making himself the organ through which the Government is to come in contact with the people. This is a mistaken policy, and conducive to no useful purpose. The bee that has no hive makes no honey. It is well to treat all with kindness who press forward to heal our grievances; but let us keep in mind that commendable caution which so often meets our eye:—“Beware of Counterfeits, for such are abroad.” Let us not be backward in curing, if we can, all removable evils; but let us not ignorantly tamper with them. There is many a wound that would not be dangerous if we did not poison it by our remedies.

THE END.





PR
4087
S76

Strictures on Coningsby

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

